

*** NETANSWERS INTERNET EXTRA ***
For the week of November 10, 1997

Climb on the highwire with me as we explore Adobe Acrobat and PDF files.

=*=*= PDF: Pretty Darn Funky? =*=*=

You're merrily cruising the web, minding your own business, clicking on links like on old pro. Then suddenly, you stumble across a downloadable file whose name ends with .PDF. You falter. Modem lights flash at you expectantly. What do you do now?

Don't panic. PDF stands for "portable document format". PDF files are also known as Adobe Acrobat files, since that's the name of the program that you need to read them. PDF files are documents that contain text and pictures. Much like a word processor document, a PDF file can be downloaded via the Internet and viewed or printed with your computer. Like a word processor document, you need a special application -- the Adobe Acrobat reader -- to view a PDF file.

The benefit of PDF is that it gives the document's creator precise control of the graphics and text on a page--better control than HTML or a word processor can give. PDF files are highly compressed: they pack a lot of information into a small file. Acrobat files can be viewed on Windows, Mac, and other systems, provided that you have the reader software.

So, if you happen to saunter over to the federal government's Fedworld Tax Form site (<http://www.fedworld.gov/taxsear.htm>) and download some PDF-format tax forms, you can be certain that they will look exactly like the tax forms that are available at the post office. (The site is particularly useful because it has just about any tax form you could ever need, even the obscure ones that aren't available at the post office.)

Before you can see or print PDF files, you have to go through the trouble and trauma of downloading and installing Acrobat. Actually, it's not difficult at all:

- 1) You can download the reader from Adobe's web site. Go to <http://www.adobe.com/prodindex/acrobat/readstep.html> and fill out the form to tell it what operating system you're using. Windows 95/NT, Windows 3.1, Macintosh, OS/2, Linux and other versions are available.

- 2) Press Download and wait (and wait and wait) while the Acrobat installer downloads. The file is over four megabytes, so the download can take a while. It should take about 45 minutes with a 28.8 Kbps modem.

- 3) When the download is through, log out. The last step is to run the installer that you just downloaded. Reboot your computer. Make a nice hot pot of tea (optional).

The next time you happen across a PDF file on the Internet, you can download it without trepidation. After it has downloaded, double-clicking on its icon will launch Acrobat and display the PDF file in all its glory: text, graphics, and formatting. From there you can print it out or just read it on screen.

The Acrobat reader is free software. If you want to create PDF files for others to download from your Web page or whatnot, you'll have to purchase the full Acrobat program, which costs \$295. To reiterate, the reader for simply viewing PDF files that others have created is absolutely free.

The downside of Acrobat -- and this is just a personal pet peeve -- is that the installer installs all sorts of ancillary files the reader needs to do its job. On my Mac, for instance, Acrobat goops up the System Folder with a control panel, extensions and oodles of fonts. Remove any of that stuff from the system and Acrobat will refuse to run. I'll have to get used to it, though, because Acrobat files are rather common on the Web. I suppose it's a small price to pay for the ability to download, see and print precisely formatted pages.

=*=*= SITES MENTIONED IN THIS ISSUE =*=*=

Fedworld Tax Forms: <http://www.fedworld.gov/taxsear.htm>

Acrobat Reader download: <http://www.adobe.com/prodindex/acrobat/readstep.html>

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The NetAnswers Internet Extra is free to all CompuServe members. It's available in the Internet Community Forum -- GO INETCOM and look in file library 11, "NetAnswers".

When I was just a little girl, I asked my mother what will I be? Will I be pretty, will I be rich? Here's what she said to me: "Copyright 1997 by Kevin Savetz. All rights reserved."